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UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 C.F.R. § 1.53(b))

Attorney Docket No. P03735US0

First Inventor or Application Identifier ANDERSON, Nancy

Title METHOD & MEANS FOR EVALUATING CUSTOMER SERVICE

Express Mail Label No. EL133865909US

PERFORMANCE

APPLICATION ELEMENTS

See MPEP chapter 600 concerning utility patent application contents.

ADDRESS TO:

Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Box Patent Application
Washington, DC 20231

1. ☒ * Fee Transmittal Form (e.g., PTO/SB/17)
(Submit an original and a duplicate for fee processing)

2. ☒ Specification [Total Pages 18]
(preferred arrangement set forth below)

- Descriptive title of the invention
- Cross References to Related Applications
- Statement Regarding Fed sponsored R & D
- Reference to Microfiche Appendix
- Background of the invention
- Brief Summary of the invention
- Brief Description of the Drawings (if filed)
- Detailed Description
- Claim(s)
- Abstract of the Disclosure

3. ☒ Drawing(s) (35 U.S.C. 113) [Total Sheets 6]

4. Oath or Declaration [Total Pages 3]

- a. ☐ Newly executed (original or copy)
- b. ☐ Copy from a prior application (37 C.F.R. § 1.63(d))
(for continuation/divisional with Box 17 completed)
[Note Box 5 below]
- i. ☐ DELETION OF INVENTOR(S)
Signed statement attached deleting
inventor(s) named in the prior application,
see 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.63(d)(2) and 1.33(b).

5. ☐ Incorporation By Reference (useable if Box 4b is checked)
The entire disclosure of the prior application, from which a
copy of the oath or declaration is supplied under Box 4b, is
considered to be part of the disclosure of the accompanying
application and is hereby incorporated by reference therein.

6. ☐ Microfiche Computer Program (Appendix)

7. Nucleotide and/or Amino Acid Sequence Submission
(if applicable, all necessary)

- a. ☐ Computer Readable Copy
- b. ☐ Paper Copy (identical to computer copy)
- c. ☐ Statement verifying identity of above copies

ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS

8. ☐ Assignment Papers (cover sheet & document(s))

9. ☐ 37 C.F.R. § 3.73(b) Statement [] Power of Attorney
(when there is an assignee)

10. ☐ English Translation Document (if applicable)

11. ☐ Information Disclosure Statement (IDS)/PTO-1449 [] Copies of IDS Citations

12. ☐ Preliminary Amendment

13. ☒ Return Receipt Postcard (MPEP 503)
(Should be specifically itemized)

14. ☒ * Small Entity Statement(s) [] Statement filed in prior application,
(PTO/SB/09-12) Status still proper and desired

15. ☐ Certified Copy of Priority Document(s)
(if foreign priority is claimed)

16. ☐ Other:

* NOTE FOR ITEMS 1 & 14: IN ORDER TO BE ENTITLED TO PAY SMALL ENTITY FEES, A SMALL ENTITY STATEMENT IS REQUIRED (37 C.F.R. § 1.21), EXCEPT IF ONE FILED IN A PRIOR APPLICATION IS RELIED UPON (37 C.F.R. § 1.21).

17. If a CONTINUING APPLICATION, check appropriate box, and supply the requisite information below and in a preliminary amendment:

☐ Continuation ☐ Divisional ☐ Continuation-in-part (CIP) of prior application No: _____

Prior application information: Examiner _____ Group / Art Unit: _____

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2/23/98

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Applicants or Patentees: Nancy Anderson and Lois J. Pannkuk

Serial No. or Patent No: _____

Filed or Issued: _____

For: METHOD AND MEANS FOR EVALUATING CUSTOMER SERVICE PERFORMANCE

**VERIFIED STATEMENT (DECLARATION) CLAIMING SMALL ENTITY
STATUS (37 CFR 1.9(f) AND 1.27(c)) - SMALL BUSINESS CONCERN**

I hereby declare that I am

☐ the owner of the small business concern identified below:

☒ an official of the small business concern empowered to act on behalf of the concern identified below:

NAME OF CONCERN PerforMax, Inc.

ADDRESS OF CONCERN 30742 Deer Drive, Huxley, Iowa 50124

I hereby declare that the above-identified small business concern qualifies as a small business concern as defined in 13 CFR 121.3-18, and reproduced in 37 CFR 1.9(d), for purposes of paying reduced fees under Section 41(a) and (b) of Title 35, United States Code, in that the number of employees of the concern, including those of its affiliates, does not exceed 500 persons. For purposes of this statement, (1) the number of employees of the business concern is the average over the previous fiscal year of the concern of the persons employed on a full-time, part-time or temporary basis during each of the pay periods of the fiscal year, and (2) concerns are affiliates of each other when either, directly or indirectly, one concern controls or has the power to control the other, or a third party or parties controls or has the power to control both.

I hereby declare that rights under contract or law have been conveyed to and remain with the small business concern identified above with regard to the invention, entitled METHOD AND MEANS FOR EVALUATING CUSTOMER SERVICE PERFORMANCE by inventor(s) Nancy L. Anderson and Lois J. Pannkuk, described in

☒ the specification filed herewith.

☐ application Serial No. _____, filed _____.

☐ Patent No. _____, issued _____.

If the rights held by the above identified small business concern are not exclusive, each individual, concern or organization having rights in the invention is listed below* and no rights to the invention are held by any person, other than the inventor, who would not qualify as an independent inventor under 37 CFR 1.9(c) if that person made the invention, or by any concern which would not qualify as a small business concern under 37 CFR 1.9(d) or a nonprofit organization under 37 CFR 1.9(e).

**NOTE: Separate verified statements are required from each named person, concern or organization having rights to the invention averring to their status as small entities. (37 CFR 1.27).*

FULL NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

☐ INDIVIDUAL

☐ SMALL BUSINESS CONCERN

☐ NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

I acknowledge the duty to file, in this application or patent, notification of any change in status resulting in loss of entitlement to small entity status prior to paying, or at the time of payment, the earliest of the issue fee or any maintenance fee due after the date on which status as a small entity is no longer appropriate. (37 CFR 1.28(b)).

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code, and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application, any patent issuing thereon, or any patent to which this verified statement is directed.

NAME AND TITLE OF PERSON SIGNING Nancy L. Anderson, Vice President

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DATE 2/4/99

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TITLE: METHOD AND MEANS FOR EVALUATING CUSTOMER
SERVICE PERFORMANCE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a method for evaluating customer service performance. More specifically, the present invention relates to surveying customers automatically using an electronic medium and recording each customer's response. Employees can then be evaluated based on customers' responses.

B. Problems in the Art

Over the years, many different methods for evaluating customer service performance have been utilized. These methods have included direct mail surveys, mystery shopping, telephone surveys, and comment cards. However, these methods all suffered from one defect or another. For example, a mail or telephone survey would only indicate a customer's general evaluation of service quality. In addition, responses to phone and mail surveys were not transaction specific, leaving an employer without information as to which employees should be rewarded or disciplined based on the customer's response.

Mystery shoppers and comment cards could be utilized for direct evaluation of a specific employee. However, both of these methods only measure a small number of transactions. Furthermore, a mystery shopper does not give any direct correlation to the satisfaction of an actual customer. In addition, comment cards are disproportionately filled out by disgruntled customers, leaving management in the dark as to which employees are doing well.

Therefore, it is a primary object of this invention to provide an improved method for evaluating customer service performance.

Another object of the invention is to provide a method for evaluating customer service performance that can measure a customer's satisfaction for a specific transaction.

A further object of the invention is to provide a method for evaluating customer service performance that will have a high response rate.

A still further object of the invention is to provide a method for evaluating customer service performance that will allow for a direct evaluation of specific employees.

Another object of the invention is to provide a method for evaluating customer service performance that will enhance client satisfaction by allowing management to identify substandard employees.

A further object of the invention is to provide a method for evaluating customer service performance that will allow management to reward exemplary

employees by identifying employees that receive high scores for customer satisfaction.

These and other objectives, features, and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the following description and claims in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A method for evaluating customer service performance comprises asking a customer one or more questions at the point of transaction. The question(s) should be designed to gauge customer service performance. Preferably, the question(s) will be presented to the customer on the display of an electronic payment device.

The customer's response(s) to the question(s) will be recorded. Preferably, the customer will enter his/her response(s) on the keypad of an electronic payment device. The response(s) will then be transmitted to a computer, and stored on the computer.

The question(s) that the customer answered and the identification of the employee that served the customer are linked to the customer's response(s). The employee's identification and the question(s) will be transmitted to the computer along with the customer's response and stored in a data structure.

Once a response has been recorded, an employee can be evaluated based on the response. While an employee could be evaluated based on a single response, preferably the evaluation would be based

on multiple responses to multiple questions over a designated measurement period to allow for a more statistically meaningful evaluation.

Alternative embodiments of the present invention comprise presenting a survey of transaction specific questions either on a printed medium, over the telephone, or on television. The customer's response can then be manually entered into the computer for the printed survey form. The customer's answers for the phone survey are entered through the phone's keypad. The customer's responses for a television survey are entered using a remote control device.

The method of the present invention is implemented by a computer software application. The software application can be written in Visual Basic, C++ or another Windows® compatible programming language. The software is able to present survey questions to customers and accept and store responses to the questions. The software links a customer's response with the question he/she was asked and the employee that served him/her. The software calculates certain scores that are indicative of customer service performance, for both individual employees and various other measurement levels. The software may be configured to interface with payroll, alert management to responses which fall below a threshold, and inform a customer of a reward for answering the survey.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a flowchart of the method according to the present invention.

Figure 2 is a block diagram of the survey groups and categories that will be utilized with the method of the present invention.

Figure 3 is a block diagram of the scoring levels that are utilized with the method of the present invention.

Figure 4 is a flowchart of a second embodiment of the method according to the present invention.

Figure 5 is a flowchart of a third embodiment of the method according to the present invention.

Figure 6 is a flowchart of a fourth embodiment of the method according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

A flowchart of a preferred embodiment of the method for evaluating customer service performance according to the present invention is shown in Figure 1. The method of the present invention is implemented by a computer software application. The method for evaluating customer service performance may be used in various environments, such as the service, retail, and hospitality industries. However, it is not intended that it be limited to those areas.

For the software that implements the present invention, three different survey systems are available. The standard survey system is comprised

of pre-defined survey groups, survey categories, and corresponding survey questions. The optional survey system allows the user to choose from a list of pre-defined survey categories and corresponding survey questions. The customized survey system allows a user to input custom programming changes to define unique survey categories and survey questions to meet the user's needs.

The first step in evaluating customer service performance involves presenting one or more questions to a customer (Fig. 1). The questions should be designed to gauge an employee's customer service performance. The questions will usually be presented to the customer at the point of transaction. Preferably, the question will be displayed on the display screen of an electronic payment device or other display monitor. An electronic payment device is one that allows the customer to pay by passing a magnetic card, such as a bank card or credit card, through a magnetic card reader. Alternatively, the question could be printed on the customer's register receipt.

The questions that are presented to the customer are derived from the survey systems described above. The standard survey system is broken into two groups, a functional group and a customer service group (Fig. 2). These groups are further subdivided into categories. Friendliness is an example of a customer service category. A question from the friendliness category might ask the customer to rate the employee's friendliness, on

a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest. A new product offering could be an example of a functional category. A question from this category might ask the customer if the employee informed the customer of a new product offering. The customer would be asked to simply give a yes/no response to this question.

After the question or questions have been presented to the customer, the customer's response is entered and recorded (Fig. 1). In the preferred embodiment, the customer will enter his response on the keyboard of the electronic payment device. The response will be electronically transmitted to a computer, and stored in the computer.

Alternatively, the customer can write his/her response on the register receipt or survey form and deposit the receipt into a box where it would get picked up and entered into the computer at a later time.

When the customer's answer is recorded, the employee's identification and the question are linked with a specific transaction. This linking is handled by the software of the present invention. The survey group and survey category are recorded along with the customer's response.

The number of customers that are asked questions will be determined by the user of the software. The user will define a frequency level which will control how many customers are asked questions. For example, a frequency level of 10% would result in approximately one of every ten

customers being surveyed. The response that the customer will input depends on the question. If the question is a functional question, the customer enters a yes/no response. For a customer service question, the customer inputs a value from 1-5.

Preferably, the question that is presented to the customer will be randomly picked or generated. The software determines which question to present to the customer through a random process. The survey group, category, and question that are selected by the random process will be appropriate to the survey system selected by the user. Alternatively, the random selection may be weighted by survey category. This would allow a user to ask customers more questions from the customer service category versus the functional category, if the user so desired.

The software of the present invention allows scores to be accumulated over a user defined time period. Scores can also be accumulated over multiple levels, the levels being defined by the user of the software. For example, scores for the customer service friendliness can be accumulated for each employee, the employee's position, the department, and other levels which be determined by the user of the software (Fig. 3). The accumulation of scores for individual employees and for the various other measurement levels can be collected and reviewed by management. This allows management to track the performance of individual employees, all employees with the same job position, and so on. The accumulation of scores for multiple levels gives

a better indication of customer service performance throughout the company. The software also keeps track of the number of transactions for each employee, and the number of times a particular question, category, and group have been presented to customers of the individual employee.

A customer service index (CSI) can be calculated for the individual employee and for each measurement level. The CSI can be calculated for each survey category and each survey question from the customer service group. The CSI is used to measure how well the employee is doing on questions that are derived from the customer service group. The CSI is calculated by converting the customers' response scores to percentage scores.

An example of a CSI calculation is presented here. If, for example, a single question from the friendliness category had been presented to four different customers, and their responses had been 5, 5, 4, and 4, the employee's CSI for that particular question would have been 90%. The CSI for an individual question is determined by the formula $CSI = (\text{sum of scores} / 5n) \times 100\%$, where sum of scores is the total of the all the responses for the particular question for the measurement period, and n is the number of times the particular question had been asked. The measurement period is the time period over which management has elected to keep track of scores.

In a similar manner, a functional ratio (FR) can be calculated. The FR is calculated for a

particular functional question by summing the number of "yes" responses, dividing that number by the total number of times the question had been presented, and converting the quotient into a percentage. For example, if four customers were asked if they had been told of a new product offering, and three had answered yes, the employee's FR for that particular question would be 75%.

An employee's performance score (PS) could be calculated from a weighted average of the FR and the CSI. The weight given to each score would depend on the employer's preference. If, for example, the employer placed a great value on the CSI it might be weighted to account for 80% of the PS, and the FR would be weighted to account for 20% of the PS. Using the numbers from the above example would give $PS = 0.8(90\%) + 0.2(75\%) = 87\%$. The CSI, FR, and PS can all be utilized in evaluating an employee's customer service performance. In a like manner, the CSI, FR, and PS for each survey group, category, and question can be determined for each employee and all of the measurement levels.

The software application can also be configured to alert management when a response falls below a given threshold (Fig. 1). The alert feature will report the employee name, the customer name (if available), and the survey question and response to management. The alert feature would allow management to solve customer service problems more quickly by following up with both the employee and, if possible, the customer. The alert could also

have a follow-up feature to remind management, at a future date, to follow up with the customer who was dissatisfied.

A customer benefit/incentive could also be utilized with the present invention. For example, the display screen on the electronic payment device could inform the customer that he/she would receive a coupon for \$1 for answering the question. This incentive would help to insure a high response rate to the survey.

The customer service indicators (CSI, FR, PS) could also be used to adjust employees compensation. For example, the employee's compensation could be increased \$1/hr. for a measurement period where the employees PS exceeds 90%. The indicators can be integrated into an existing payroll software package, by interfacing the software of the present invention with the payroll software, or could be produced in a report form to allow management to manually adjust compensation levels.

A second embodiment of the present invention is shown in Fig. 4. A business interaction will prompt an automated survey through an attached printer. The survey questions will be transaction specific. The survey can be immediately given to the client or mailed to the client at a later time. The survey response is entered into a computer, and then the answers are evaluated in the same manner as described above. The automated survey method is particularly suited to service industries, such as banking and insurance, and hospitality industries,

such as hotels and restaurants.

A third embodiment of the present invention is shown in Fig. 5. In this embodiment, a customer is asked a transaction specific question over the telephone. The customer's response is entered on the keypad of the telephone. The response is transmitted to a computer over the phone line or it can be entered into the computer manually. Responses can then be evaluated. The electronic phone survey is well suited to the hospitality industry, e.g., hotels and motels.

A fourth embodiment of the present invention is shown in Fig. 6. A client is offered the opportunity to respond to a survey through a television. The survey questions are transaction specific. The client's response is entered through a remote control device. The television survey is particularly suited to the hotel setting.

In the drawings and specification there has been set forth a preferred embodiment of the invention, and although specific terms are employed, these are used in a generic and descriptive sense only and not for purposes of limitation. Changes in the form and proportion of parts as well as in the substitution of equivalents are contemplated as circumstances may suggest or render expedient without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention as further defined in the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1.

A method of evaluating customer service performance of a specific employee, comprising: presenting a question to a customer at the point of transaction about the employee's performance; obtaining a response to the question from the customer at the point of transaction; recording the customer's response; evaluating the response.

2.

The method of evaluating customer service performance according to claim 1, further comprising: linking the question and response with the employee who served the customer.

3.

The method of evaluating customer service performance according to claim 1 wherein the question is presented to the customer on the display of an electronic payment device.

4.

The method of evaluating customer service performance according to claim 1 wherein the question is presented on a monitor and the response is entered on a keyboard.

5.

The method of evaluating customer service performance according to claim 1 wherein the question is presented on a paper medium.

6.

The method of evaluating customer service performance according to claim 1 wherein the question that is presented to the customer is randomly picked from a group of questions.

7.

The method of evaluating customer service performance according to claim 1, further comprising:
accumulating scores for questions for individual employees over a defined time period.

8.

The method of evaluating customer service performance according to claim 1, further comprising:
accumulating scores for questions for different measurement levels over a defined time period.

9.

The method of evaluating customer service performance according to claim 1 wherein the response is compiled in a computer.

10.

The method of evaluating customer service performance according to claim 1, further comprising:
communicating an alert signal when a customer service response falls below a threshold.

11.

The method of evaluating customer service performance according to claim 1, further comprising:

offering the customer a reward as an incentive to answer the question.

12.

A computer software application for use in evaluating customer service performance, the software application comprising:
an electronic record comprising a plurality of survey questions about specific transactions and specific employees;
a database for storing responses to the survey questions;
a user interface to present the questions to the customer and enter responses into the software application;
a control program to present at least one of the survey questions to customers, and to accumulate responses to the question;
the software residing in a digital medium.

13.

The computer software application of claim 12 wherein the control program further comprises the capacity to link responses with the question and the employee who served the customer.

14.

The computer software application of claim 12 wherein the control program further comprises a capacity to accumulate scores for individual questions, and to calculate performance indicators.

15.

The computer software application of claim 12 wherein the control program further comprises a

capacity to communicate a management alert when a response below a threshold has been entered.

16.

The computer software application of claim 12 wherein the control program further comprises a capacity to inform customers of an incentive for answering the survey question.

17.

The computer software application of claim 12 wherein the control program further comprises a capacity to communicate performance indicators to payroll software.

18.

A method of evaluating customer service performance, comprising:
asking transaction specific questions about specific employees;
recording customer responses;
transmitting the responses to a computer;
evaluating the responses to link specific employees to specific transactions.

19.

The method of evaluating customer service performance according to claim 18, wherein the questions and responses are made at the point of transaction.

20.

The method of evaluating customer service according to claim 18, wherein the questions and responses are made via telephone.

21.

The method of evaluating customer service according to claim 18, wherein the questions and responses are made via a television with a remote control device.

22.

The method of evaluating customer service according to claim 18, wherein the questions and responses are made using a printed media.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A method for evaluating customer service performance is implemented by a computer software application. Customers are presented with transaction specific questions to evaluate particular employees. A customer's response to a survey question is stored on a computer. Different performance indicators are calculated for the employee based on the responses to the customer surveys. The employee is evaluated based on these performance indicators.

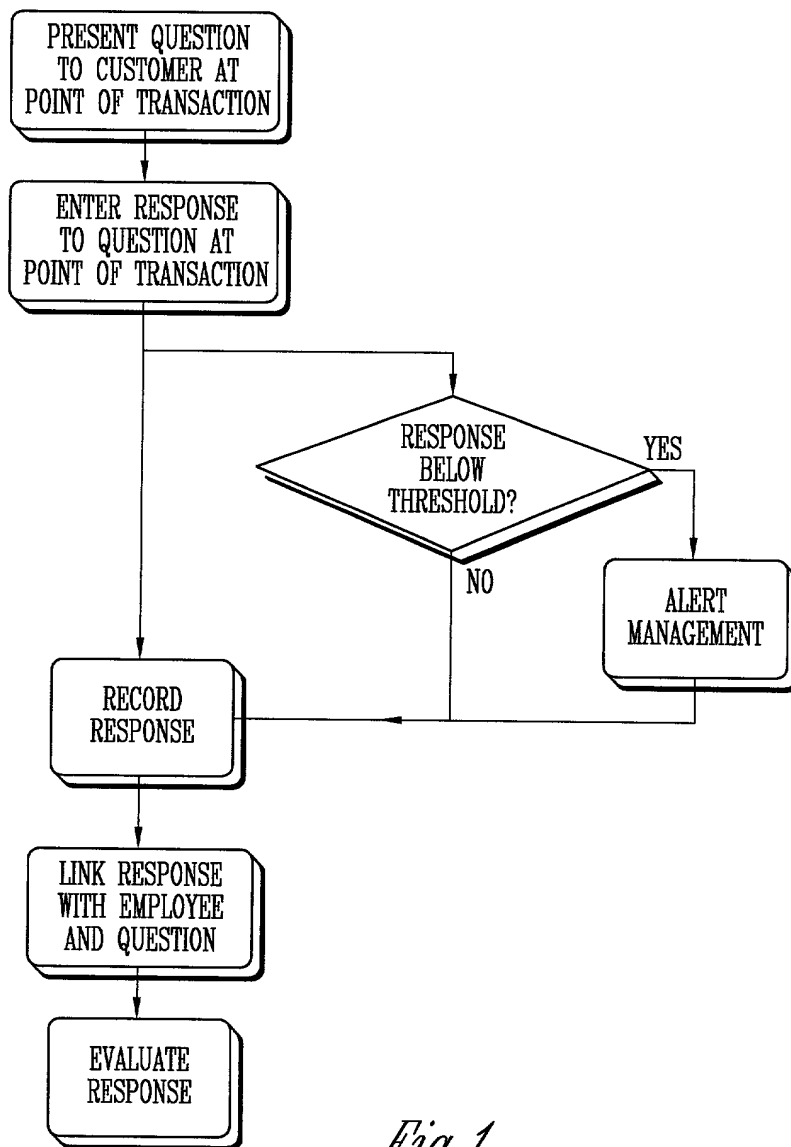


Fig. 1

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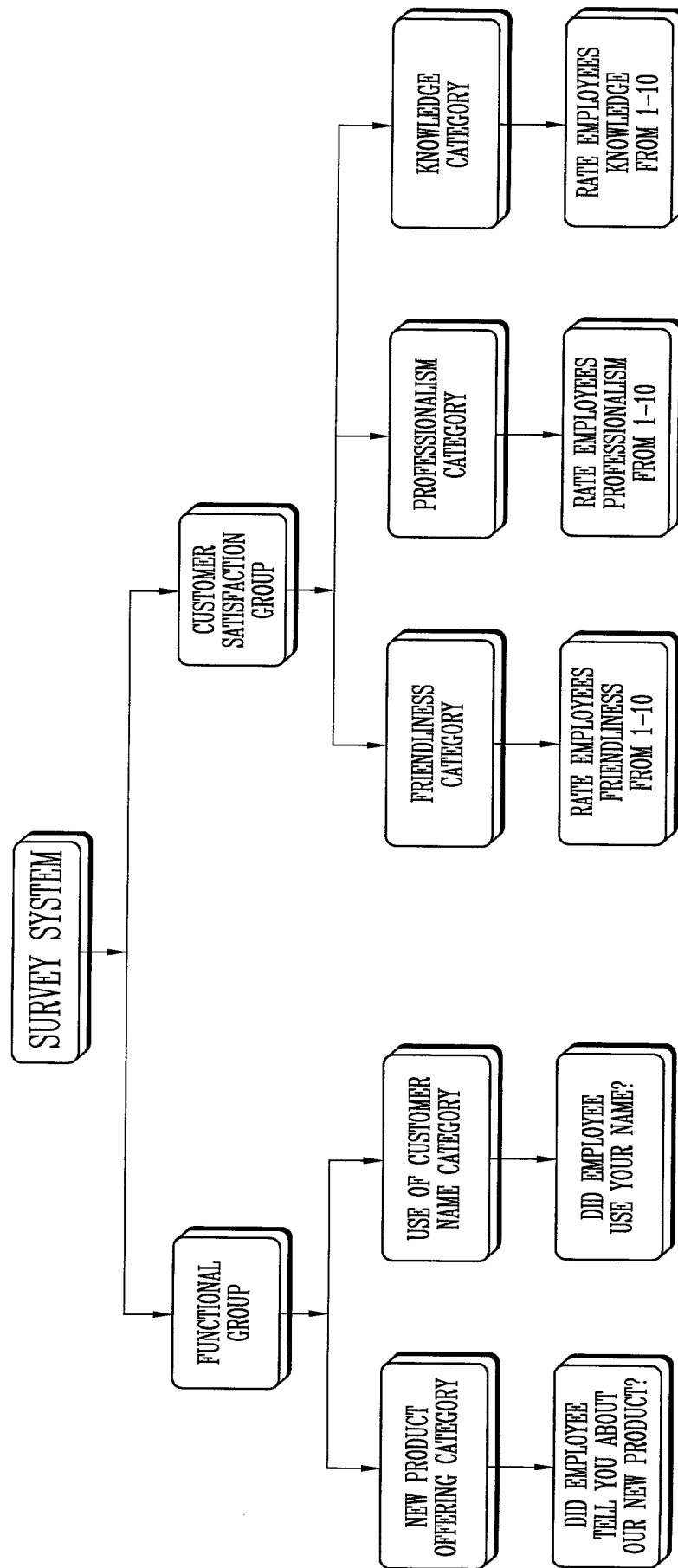


Fig. 2

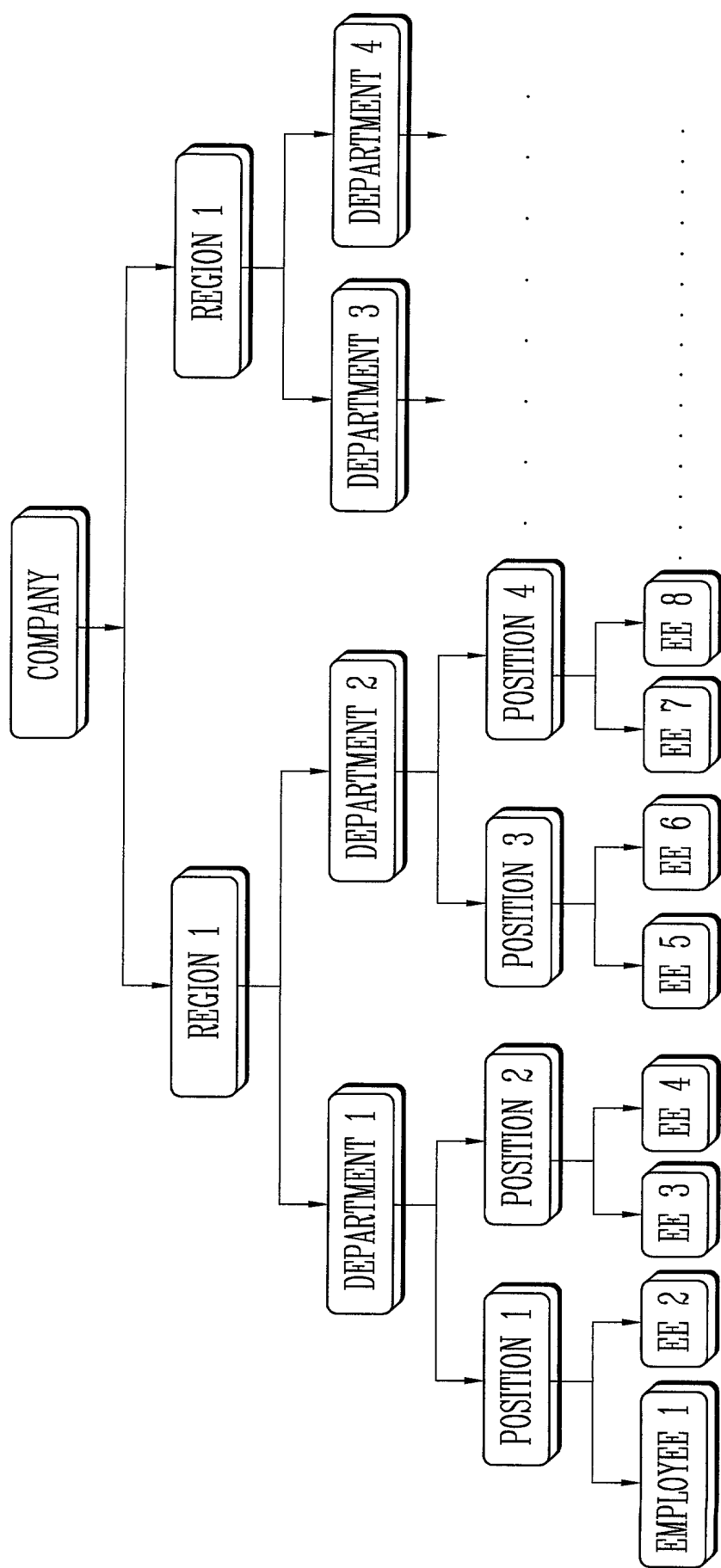


Fig. 3

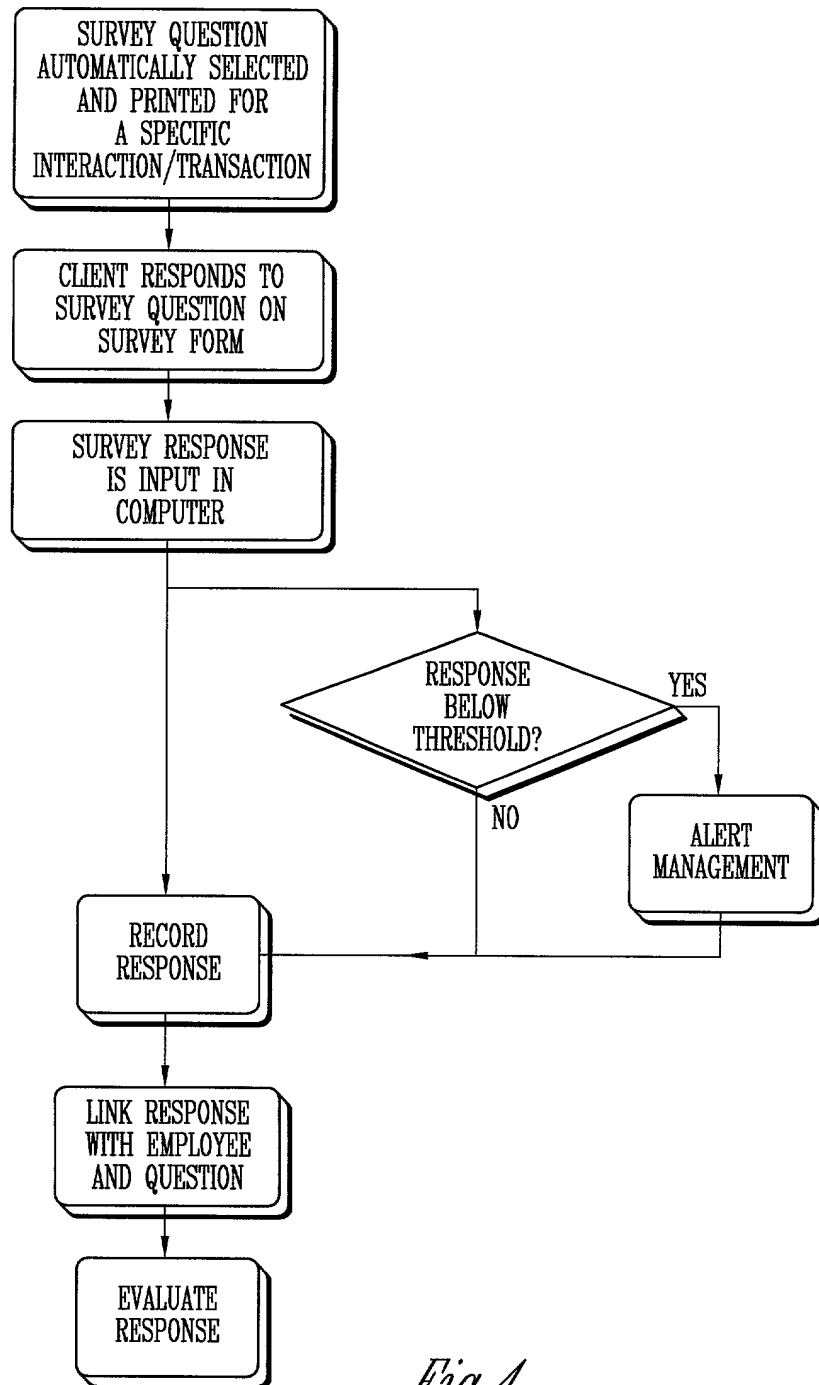


Fig. 4

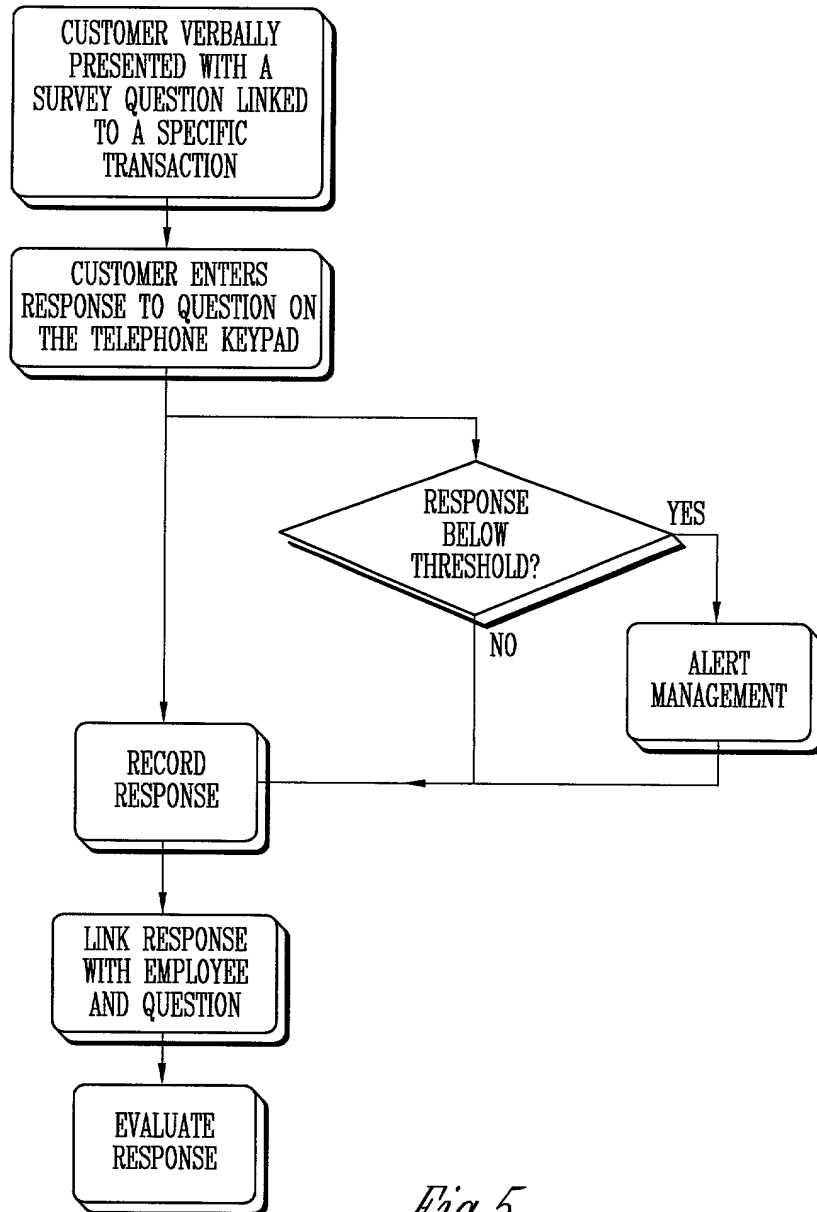


Fig. 5

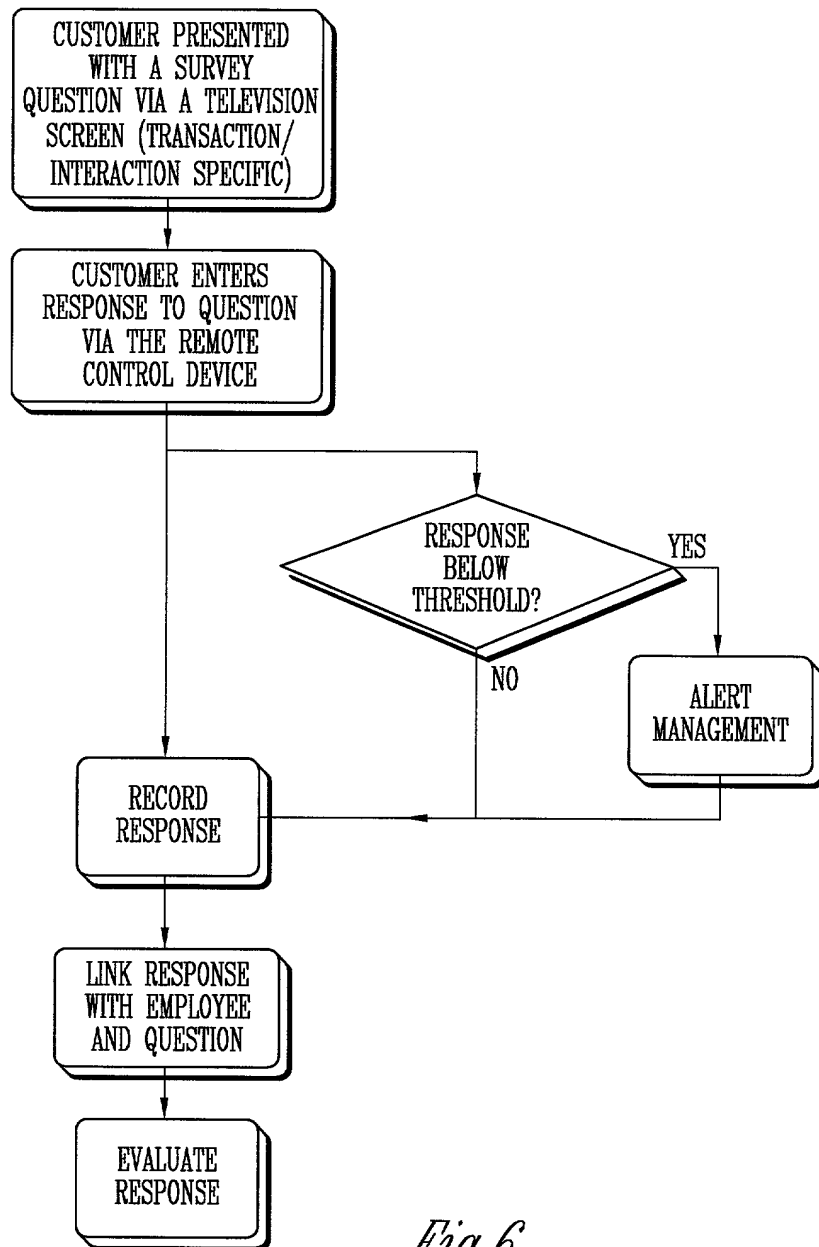


Fig. 6

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

COMBINED DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY

FOR JOINT INVENTORS

As the below named coinventors, we hereby declare that:

Our residences, post office addresses and citizenships are as stated below next to our names. We believe we are the original, first and joint inventors of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled as follows: **METHOD AND MEANS FOR EVALUATING CUSTOMER SERVICE PERFORMANCE**, the specification and drawings of which are attached hereto.

We hereby state that we have reviewed and understand the contents of the above identified specification and drawings, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

We acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in Title 37, Code Of Federal Regulations, Section 1.56. We further declare that no application for patent or inventor's certificate on this invention has been filed by us, our legal representatives or assigns in any country foreign to the United States of America except as identified below:

NONE.

And we hereby appoint ZARLEY, McKEE, THOMTE, VOORHEES & SEASE, comprising Donald H. Zarley, Registration No. 18,543; Bruce W. McKee, Registration No. 19,651; Dennis L. Thomte, Registration No. 22,497; Michael G. Voorhees, Registration No. 25,715; Edmund J. Sease, Registration No. 24,741; Mark D. Hansing, Registration No. 30,643; Kirk M. Hartung, Registration No. 31,021; Daniel J. Cosgrove, Reg. No. 36,770; Michael R. Crabb, Registration No. 37,298; Heidi Sease Nebel, Registration No. 37,719; Wendy K. Hartung, Registration No. 39,705; Jeffrey D. Harty,

Registration No. 40,639; James A. Napier, Registration No. 42,025; and Mark Ziegelbein, Registration No. 43,307; 801 Grand Avenue, Suite 3200, Des Moines, Iowa 50309, Telephone 515-288-3667, our attorneys to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the Patent Office connected therewith.

We hereby declare that all statements made herein are of our own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code, and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

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This declaration ends with this page.